

*Our arms-sales policies
have created "commitments" that could
embroil us in another foreign war.*

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America's White-Collar Mercenaries

By MICHAEL KLARE

THESE ADVERTISEMENTS, placed in well-known periodicals, are geared toward a new kind of mercenary: a soldier of fortune who sells his technical abilities rather than combat skills, who wears a suit and tie rather than combat fatigues, and who carries an attaché case rather than a submachine gun—in other words, a *white-collar mercenary*. Unlike the mercenaries of old, who usually worked for disreputable governments or renegade warlords, this new breed of warriors usually works for established governments or, more often, for giant multinational corporations engaged in the arms trade. Instead of spearheading coups or revolts, the new mercenaries spend their workdays repairing missiles, programming computers, or operating communications consoles. And while these new mercenaries may lack the élan of their more traditional brethren, they can pride themselves on taking control over the war machines of some of the world's most important new powers.

From all available indications, the number of white-collar mercenaries deployed abroad is rising rapidly. According to State Department figures, in early 1978 there were some 11,300 U.S. "civilian contract personnel" working overseas in connection with military sales programs, or about three times the number

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GENERAL STAFF

Computer Sciences Corporation, "The Company That Has Made a Difference," has requirements for aggressive self-starters in IRAN. GENERAL STAFF SPECIALIST: Heavy U.S. Army General Staff experience in either E1, G2, G3, G4 or Comptroller activities. SOFTWARE SYSTEMS DESIGN ANALYST: Experienced in design and development of management information systems supporting a military general staff, preferably U.S. Army.

earlier (excluding Vietnam War programs). Most experts agree, moreover, that the number of Americans working on such programs will increase enormously over the next decade, as ambitious Third World countries seek to expand and modernize their military arsenals.

The proliferation of white-collar mercenaries is a direct consequence of the boom in military sales to newly rich, developing countries. Although many of these nations—particularly the oil king-

doms of the Persian Gulf—possess the will and cash to become modern military powers, they lack the trained personnel needed to maintain and operate all the new high-technology arms they have acquired from the advanced nations. Many Third World nations now require that any major arms contract provide for the delivery of such "back-up" services as training, logistics, and maintenance along with the weaponry itself. And since the need for such "technical military services" tends to increase with the degree of sophistication of the weapons involved, the growing trade in high-technology arms has naturally led to a boom-

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ing demand for white-collar mercenaries.

As the world's leading supplier of modern arms, the United States is not surprisingly the principal source of technical military services. According to government figures, a total of 14,362 U.S. nationals were engaged in tasks arising from the "implementation of sales and commercial exports under the Arms Export Control Act" on January 1, 1978. Of this number, 11,323 were civilians and another 3039 were U.S. military personnel assigned to military missions and technical assistance field teams. Most experts, however, consider these figures to be extremely conservative, since they exclude many technicians working in such military-related activities as highway and harbor construction, telecommunications development, and air-traffic control. Indeed, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee estimated in 1976 that there were at least 24,000 Americans in Iran alone, working on military-related projects, and that the total would reach 50,000 to 60,000 by 1980.

The sale of technical military services can be extremely lucrative. According to the Defense Security Assistance Agency, between February 1975 and July 1977 U.S. sales of technical military services under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program amounted to an impressive \$2.45 billion. Since this figure excludes sales under the Commercial Sales program (i.e., direct sales by U.S. corporations, as distinct from sales by the U.S. government of equipment from its own stockpiles), which account for about 25 percent of the overseas job slots, the total value of such sales must exceed \$3 billion. And since most Third World governments are acquiring arms faster than they are improving the quality of domestic technical education, the demand for such services is sure to rise in the years ahead.

EXCERPT:

In an unusual transaction that bypassed normal U.S. arms sales channels, the Iranian government has also hired Rockwell International to design, install, and manage an elaborate electronic intelligence-gathering system. This project, known as Ibex, will use specially equipped U.S. EC-130 aircraft to pick up electronic signals from foreign military agencies and relay them to special processing stations on the ground, where the signals will be recorded, decoded, and analyzed. According to *Aviation Week*, Rockwell "has recruited a special Ibex staff, among them former Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency personnel, who are training about 100 Iranians" in sophisticated cryptographic skills. Other U.S. personnel will be assigned to the "secure, restricted-access, windowless facilities" being constructed to house Ibex paraphernalia in Iran. Although the Rockwell contract calls for Iranian personnel to take full responsibility for operation of these facilities at some point in the future, most analysts believe that it will be a long time before enough Iranians can be provided with the necessary skills.

THESE PROJECTS, WHICH PLACE AMERICAN personnel in what are obviously sensitive military positions, pose profound risks for American foreign policy. Perhaps the greatest danger is that such operations will lead to inadvertent U.S. military involvement in local conflict abroad. Since these technicians perform critical tasks at the very nerve centers of the host country's war machine, they are certain to be among the first targets in any attack on these countries. True, the probability of a conventional war involving these countries is Approved For Release 2004/11/01 : CIA-RDP88-01315R000300380003-8 imaginable situations that could trigger such a conflict.

Iran, for instance, has vowed to intervene anywhere in the Persian Gulf if insurgent forces seize control of any of the littoral sheikdoms, and such action could conceivably precipitate retaliation by one of the radical Arab states. By the same token, Saudi Arabia's continuing support for the "front-line" Arab states could easily provoke Israeli reprisals (directed, in particular, against Saudi air force installations) in the event of a new Mideast conflict. Either of these scenarios—or others equally credible—would almost inevitably produce significant American casualties. Under such circumstances, the President would be under enormous pressure to take decisive action to protect the remaining Americans and their families (who usually accompany U.S. white-collar mercenaries on extended assignments abroad). And given the scale of the U.S. support apparatus in some of these countries, any such rescue operation would surely require a major military effort. In this way we could be sucked into a major military conflict that we otherwise could have avoided.

Even if we are not drawn into such a conflict, these programs could produce significant strains in U.S. relations with certain foreign governments. Yet, while no responsible official would dispute the fact that the deployment of 25,000 or even 5000 U.S. servicemen in a Third World country represents a major U.S. commitment to that country's government, top U.S. leaders often talk and act as if the deployment of that many white-collar mercenaries had no significant foreign policy implications. As we have seen, however, U.S. contract personnel often perform critical military functions in the host country's military apparatus, and thus these projects are viewed by the government involved as constituting a major U.S. military commitment. It follows, therefore, that any problems or upheavals arising from that commitment—whether or not the Americans involved wore U.S. military uniforms—would have a major impact on U.S. relations with that government.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee explicitly acknowledged this in its study of U.S. arms sales to Iran: "The U.S., having sold sophisticated arms in large quantities to Iran, has assumed a growing and significant 'commitment' to Iran in terms of supporting that equipment—an unstated but nevertheless real obligation to train Iranians and to provide logistical support for the lifetime of the equipment." Thus the United States could not, according to the study, "abandon, substantially diminish, or even redirect its arms programs without precipitating a major crisis in U.S.-Iranian relations." Moreover, with so many Americans working for the shah, our failure to recall U.S. technicians from their posts in the event of an Iranian attack on any of its neighbors would be perceived by all concerned as an "implicit endorsement of their action," leading, conceivably, to reprisals against the United States; if, on the other hand, these personnel *did* walk off their jobs in such a crisis, they "could become, in a sense, hostages" of the shah. Either way, U.S. foreign policy would suffer.

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